DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 040 FL 019 698

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TITLE The Traps of Formal Correspondence.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the "Language International" Conference (1st, Elsinore, Denmark, May 31-June 12, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Context Clues; Expressive Language; Foreign Countries; *Grammar Translation Method; Interpreters; *Interpretive Skills; Language Proficiency; Language Skills; *Translation
IDENTIFIERS Correspondence Theory; Love Story

ABSTRACT

The dangers of translation are discussed when the translator does not try to create textual equivalence, but settles for formal correspondence (i.e., with simple transcoding at a linguistic level) during the process of translating. Difficulties of explaining, commenting, or summarizing rather than translating are also discussed. Pedagogical and didactic implications are considered. Concrete examples taken from Erich Segal's "Love Story" are analyzed to illustrate the dangers of formal correspondence; French, Hungarian, and German translations of the English excerpts are used. Contains 6 references. (LB)

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The First 'Language International' Conference
Teaching Translation and Interpreting
Elsinore, Denmark, 31 May 1991 to 2 June 1991

THE TRAPS OF FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE

by

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0. In this paper I would like to discuss the dangers to which the translator is exposed whenever he does not try to create textual equivalences, but is satisfied with formal correspondences (i.e. with simple transcoding at a linguistic level) during the process of translating. As we shall see later, the same trouble may occur if -- overshooting the mark -- he does not translate but explains, comments or summarizes. We can find many names for the two processes in the literature of translation theory, but the main point is that we cannot regard either of them as translation: one of them is "below" the translation, the other "beyond" it. Since the principal subject of this conference is the examination of questions connected with teaching translation and interpreting, this paper does not go far in analysing theoretical questions of this matter, but deals rather with its pedagogical and didactic implications.

1.1. Before addressing the problems indicated in the title, I would like to say a few words on my general conception about translating. On the one hand, because it would make it easier for us to set the limits of the concrete problem, on the other hand, because -- since I am a translator myself -- my opinion differs somewhat from that of those who only deal with translating in theory. For practising translators I do not need to demonstrate that many problems "detected" by (some) theory-writers prove to be pseudo-

problems from the aspect of actual translating and do not even arise in practice. At the same time, during the process of translating you may often be confronted by difficulties whose solution the theory does not mention.

1.2. I would like to emphasize that I do not intend to sketch my own translation theory, nor do I want to set the outlines of a "general and unified" theory of translation, all the less so since for the moment this exists only in the theory-writers' day-dreams. I shall also not mention the conditions which are definitely needed for the construction of such a "general theory of translation". Moreover,I do not want to decide whether we should regard translation theory as an independent and strictly definiable field of "classical human sciences". I suspect that we should not, but these questions in themselves are of not too great interest.

1.3. According to G. TOURY (1980: 23), "one of the possible interlingual types of performance is that which has to come to be known as translation". In the first, global approach we consider the process of translating to be a kind of linguistic activity, which also consists of numerous extralinguistic, irrational, unformalisable, indescribable components. If we regard translating as a kind of practical activity, we have to accept the fact that its theory, the "theory of translation" is not a rigid doctrine, a dogma or a set of rules and regulations to be respected, but perhaps in a somewhat paradoxical way, the theory of this activity, a kind of "Handlungswissenschaft", praxeology, "théorie de l'application"

which is not judged by its a priori established 'scientific' epistemological criteria, but by its a posteriori products, i.e. the actual target language texts (LADMIRAL 1979: 189-190).[1]

In this approach the theory of translation is nothing other than "reasoning", meditating, philosophizing about problems encountered during the actual process of translating.

1.4. At the same time, this praxeologist approach to translation also implies the method which translation theory should follow and which we are going to apply while analysing concrete translation problems. The essence of this method is that it does not use a kind of theoretical construction as a starting point, but it takes actual translation problems which are subjected to deep and thorough analysis. The result of this analysis enables us to formulate general statements (i.e. theorems) which go far beyond the concrete individual problem analysed and could serve as an orientation for practising translators in elaborating their own translating strategies.

1.5. Translation theory must not leave out the translator (and all "human factors" of translation) from its analysis, even if this means giving up the illusory day-dream of scientific accuracy. The normative (based on linguistics) concept of translation prescribes the creating of equivalence between a textual material of a source-language and that of a target-language, it describes -- sometimes using frightening terminology -- the different types of equivalence, classes and subclasses, but does not say a word about how the translator can put these types into practice. The consequences of this normative concept are well-known, here it may be enough to mention

the hostility to theory experienced among practising translators. Equivalence, in any case, is not a kind of permanent, fixed, pre-given category (by whom, by the way?), a goal which the translator has to reach by all means or at least to approach to an optimum extent, but a "here-and-now" functional-relational category, a norm-governed concept, an empirical phenomenon which is created by the translator himself by making some kind of connection between the given points of the (fixed) source language text and those of the target language text (created by the translator). For all these reasons, we can say that each translator (whose task is to create equivalence) has a different equivalence-concept, so does each receiver (who, not knowing the original text, cannot choose but regard the solutions given by the translator as eo ipso equivalent), finally so does each aesthetician, each semiotician, each publishing editor, each translation critic, each expert (who on the basis of more or less subjective considerations expresses his opinion according to his own norms about the existence of equivalence, its partial or total absence between the two texts). It is obvious that the translator-expert's situation is the most inconvenient. Even if (let us suppose) he knows all the possible equivalence-types which may come up while translating the given source language text, as an expert he is absolutely aware of the fact that he will not be able to create total equivalence between the two text: his freedom simply means that he can choose which equivalence-types to reject and which to keep. In a very strange way, the greater the effort the translator makes in order to achieve total equivalence, the less acceptable the target language text is as a translation. So-called

total equivalence (pure linguistic transcoding) cannot be regarded as translation. Since the translator knows very well (or at least feels instinctively) that he is not able to produce a translational equivalent in every aspect, he has no other choice but to concentrate his activity on certain features of the text which he considers significant: thus his efforts are directed at somehow transmitting these features, which he considers important and therefore to be emphasized, into the target language text. The range of such significant features (and of those which can be considered significant) is very wide. Naturally, in the case of a poem we generally consider totally different features significant than in the instructions for the use of an electric razor, for instance. But since all texts have semiotics, it results that all texts have features which can be considered significant. However, the translator himself has to decide which features of a text to be translated are significant (or, to put it differently: which features should be significant). No theory of translation will tell him which features are (should be) more significant than the others in a given text; there is no such higher forum or instance to which he could turn concerning the propriety of his decisions.

1.6. Unfortunately, it is impossible here to analyse further my general views about translation. So I would like to finish my introduction with the following statement which may seem rather a commonplace. The translator needs to have some kind of global conception (idea, strategy, philosophy) not only when translating philosophical texts, but when translating any text. For this

reason, some kind of philosophy appears in all acts of translating, and it is always present, even if the translator himself is not aware of it or tries to deny it. Unfortunately, often the lack of this philosophy is what is so striking in bad translations.

2.1. In the following I would like to make an attempt to show the dangers of the traps of formal correspondence through an analysis of some concrete examples taken from Erich Segal's Love Story. I am convinced that both translators and theoretical experts can draw a lesson from the comparison of the text of the novel with its translations in different languages.

2.2. I have already referred to the interesting paradox of translation: the more accurate it is linguistically, the less acceptable it is as a translation of the text. Linguistic transcoding is not real translation, and translators should be allowed to turn to this method only in exceptional cases, since it extremely rarely leads to textual equivalence. On the contrary: in unfortunate cases it evokes such connotative references in the receiver which are far from the intention of the author. Let us see an example of this:

> Perhaps some neighboring diners heard this remark. As if to compensate for my loudness, Oliver III aimed his next words at me in a biting whisper:
>
> "Marry her now, and I will not give you the time of day."
>
> Who gave a shit if somebody overheard.
>
> "Father, you don't know the time of day." (p. 62)

The French translation:

> Peut-être quelques dîneurs voisins avaient-ils entendu ma remarque. Comme pour compenser mon emportement, Oliver chuchota, mais d'un ton cinglant:
>
> - Epouse-la maintenant, mais alors ne viens même plus me demander l'heure qu'il est.
>
> Je me fichais pas mal qu'on nous entende ou pas.
>
> - Mais tu n'as jamais su l'heure qu'il était, père, dis-je. (pp. 85-86)

This instance clearly shows that the French translator has fallen into the trap of formal correspondence. The situation described in this short dialogue-passage is perfectly straightforward: Oliver's father disapproves his son's hasty marriage proposal to Jenny, and threatens him that if he marries her without his permission, he will ignore the event completely. The Hungarian translation -- avoiding the trap of formal correspondence -- is totally equivalent, and perfectly meets the requirements suggested by the situation:

> - Ha most elveszed, nem ismerlek többé! (p. 65)
> (Literally: 'If you marry her now, I no longer know you')

What could the source of the problem be? The French translator, as we can see, has translated literally the American idiomatic structure '<u>not to give one the time of day</u>', which is marked "slang, colloquial" in the dictionary and means: 'to dislike some-

one strongly enough so as to totally ignore him'. To keep the French 'demander l'heure à quelqu'un' is disturbing, since it unfortunately interferes with the idiomatic expression 'on ne te demande pas l'heure qu'il est' meaning about: 'it is none of your business'. Probably I do not need to say that in the represented part of the text there is no talk of time or asking the time. The simple transcoding of the American idiomatic expression may totally disturb the French reader.[2]

2.3. The second example we are going to examine can be regarded as a direct contrast to the previous one. The problem here is caused by the fact that the French translator was trying at all costs to avoid the trap hidden in choosing formal correspondence. His applied "solution", however, is doomed to failure due to other considerations:

> We drove on for a long time without saying a word. But something was wrong.
>
> "What whole thing makes you sick, Jen?" I asked as a long afterthought.
>
> "The disgusting way you treat your father."
>
> "How about the disgusting way he treats me?"
>
> I had opened a can of beans. Or, more appropriately, spaghetti sauce. For Jenny launched into a full-scale offense on paternal love. That whole Italian-Mediterranean syndrome. And how I was disrespectful.
>
> "You bug him and bug him and bug him," she said.
>
> (pp. 58-59)

The French translation:

Nous roulâmes un long moment sans dire un mot. Quelque chose me chiffonnait cependant.

- Qu'est-ce qui te rend malade, Jen? demandai-je, comme si je venais d'y repenser.

- La manière écoeurante dont tu traites ton père.

- Et la manière écoeurante dont il me traite, ça ne te fait rien?

J'aurais mieux fait de me taire. Jenny, en effet, se lança dans un sermon en règle sur l'amour filial. Tout le syndrome latino-méditerranéen y passa. En un mot comme en cent, je n'étais pas un fils respectueux.

- Tu le provoques, tu le contraries et tu l'empoisonnes sans arrêt, dit-elle. (pp. 79-80)

To understand this passage of the text also does not present any problem, the reader can easily "find out" the meaning of the metaphorical allusion hidden in the expression '<u>to open a can of beans</u>': this as well as the spaghetti sauce is an allusion to the heroine's Italian origin and generally to the volubility of Italian people. The French translator's equivalence ("J'aurais mieux fait de me taire") is disputable from many aspects. It is true though, that the contents of the sentence (if you like, its "semantic deep structure") is expressed here as well, and under different circumstances the conversation, where this sentence is heard, would make such an equivalence-solution possible. However, in this case, we

are dealing with a literary text, and in the original this meaning is expressed by using an image, applying a metaphor which has totally disappeared in the French translation. The French text has "killed" the metaphor, but says straight out, what is only suggested in an implicit way in the original text. Although the backgrounds are different, both examples represent the "theory of taking the line of least resistance", since it is surely easier to "kill" a metaphor than to find an appropriate target language equivalent.

As for the Hungarian translation, although the sentence is unnecessarily voluble, it preserves the image evoked by the original text:

> Mintha egy babkonzervet nyitottam volna ki. Vagy egy paradicsomos spagettit, hogy stilusosabb legyek. (p. 61)

(Literally: 'As if I had opened a can of beans. Or, to render the style better, a can of spaghetti sauce'.)

From the aspect of equivalence, the German translation is of great interest: here the image, the metaphor is rendered by another image, whose connotations are not exactly the same as those of the original, but for me it is a still more acceptable solution than the flat, fact-announcing sentence of the French translation:

> Ich hatte in ein Wespennest gestochen oder, um einen passenderen Vergleich zu wählen: in eine Dose Spaghetti-Sauce. (p. 66)

(Literally: 'I had burst open a wasps'nest, or to choose a more appropriate comparison: a can of spaghetti-sauce.')

It is remarkable that in the French text we can find three verbs (provoquer, contrarier, empoisonner) standing for the English verb to bug, which shows that the French translator found the semantic field of 'to bug someone' too wide so as to replace it by one single verb. This treatment can be accepted, although it breaks the monotony of the original sentence. The Hungarian translator seems to consider this monotonous characteristic of this sentence to be significant, because he is careful to keep the syntax of the sentence, realising by this the so-called "syntactic equivalence":

- Csak csipkelödsz és csipkelödsz és csipkelödsz - mondta.

(p. 61)

(Literally: 'You are just teasing and teasing and teasing, she said.')

We may perhaps rebuke the translator on the grounds that the Hungarian verb csipkelödik ('to tease') seems to be a little overwrought, "elevated" for this colloquial, easy-flowing style.

2.4. The time allowed me does not make it possible to analyse further examples from Love Story with a similar fullness of detail, but perhaps these two are enough to see that the comparison of the text of the novel with its translations in different languages could prove a gold-mine for the theoretical experts of translation.

Here they can find the different equivalence-types "in activity", "during operation", not "pure" as the books of reference and the contrastive grammars mention them. However, the truth is that most of the problems of translation are not of a syntactic or grammatical character. The biggest difficulty in translating novels like Love Story is hidden in the style of these works. It is very difficult to render the easy-flowing university slang used by the characters of this novel while communicating with one another, in languages (e.g. Hungarian) which are almost totally lacking in this linguistic register. In such cases the translator is forced to turn to different re-adaptations, and the success of solutions is quite questionable. Of course, not having any other choice, he either has to walk into the trap or not, but the latter solution may often involve enormous losses. Let us see how one single case which proves this statement:

> I told her how I loathed being programmed for the Barrett Tradition -- which she should have realized, having seen me cringe at having to mention the numeral at the end of my name. And I did not like having to deliver x amount of achievement every single term.
>
> "Oh yeah," said Jenny with broad sarcasm, "I notice how you hate getting A's, being All-Ivy --" (p. 37)

The French translation:

> (...) Il ne me plaisait pas non plus d'être obligé d'exhiber un nombre x de succès chaque trimestre que le bon Dieu

faisait.

- C'est vrai, dit Jenny d'un ton lourd de sarcasme, j'ai remarqué que tu avais horreur d'avoir les meilleures notes, d'être du All-Ivy... (p. 47)

The German translation:

(...) Und es paßte mir auch nicht in den Kram, bei jedem Semester die und die Leistungen produzieren zu müssen.

"Ja, ja", sagte Jenny betont sarkastisch, "ich seh schon, wie widerlich dir das alles ist, immer diese guten Noten und daß du zur All-Ivy-Liga gehörst --" (p. 41)

The Hungarian translation:

(...) És ki nem állhatom, hogy nekem feltétlenül el kell érnem iksz számú eredményt minden rothadt félévben.

- No persze - mondta Jenny szókimondó gúnnyal -, észrevettem, mennyire utálsz kitünöt kapni és bajnokcsapatban játszani... (pp. 36-37)

As we can see, the French, German and Hungarian translators render the American expression 'to get A's' (i.e. 'to get the best mark at college-examinations') respectively as follows: avoir la meilleure note ('to have the best mark'), immer diese guten Noten ('always these good marks') and kitünöt kapni ('to get an excellent mark'). The pragmatic re-adaptation is, of course, indispensable here, since

the American system of colleges and universities, and the evaluation of examinations differ a lot of those of the European. The same problem arises with 'single term': in French it is translated as trimestre, in Hungarian as félév ('half-year, semester'); no translation equivalent in German.

The translation of the expression 'being All-Ivy' also causes some trouble. The expression is either intelligible for the average American reader or he may look it up in an encyclopaedia or dictionary, where he will find the following explanation: it is a championship in the north-eastern U.S. where the students of colleges and universities having a reputation for high scholastic achievement and social prestige (such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Dartmouth, Cornell, Pennsylvania and Brown) are allowed to take part. The French translator simply transcodes it, adding no comment to it, altough the meaning of the expression is not so obvious for the average French reader; in the German text we can find All-Ivy-League, which at least includes a minimum of the explanation. In the Hungarian translation we can see bajnokcsapatban játszani (literally: 'to play in a championship-team'). This equivalent, which although it expresses the essence, loses all the American referential "cultural" connotation of the expression.

3.1. Unfortunately, there is not enough time to analyse further concrete examples, but perhaps the passages presented provide us with sufficient material to draw certain more general conclusions.

3.2. In 1965, John CATFORD who approaches the problems of translation from a linguistic point of view, within the framework of traditional (descriptive) translation theory, makes a strict distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence -- treating both concepts as a linguistic term.

> A formal correspondent (...) is any target-language category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the "same" place in the "economy" of the target-language as the given source-language category occupies in the source-language. (...) A textual translation equivalent (...) is any target-language form (text or portion of text) which is observed to be the equivalent of a given source-language form (text or portion of text).
>
> (CATFORD 1965: 27)

In spite of the somewhat tautologic formulation and the obscurity of the expressions "is observed" or "can be said", the opposition between formal correspondence at langue-level and textual equivalence at discours-level is one of the most important distinctions of "traditional" descriptive translation theory, which also appears with different denominations and authors (cf. E. NIDA opposition of "formal equivalence / dynamic equivalence"; with other authors: "denotative equivalence / connotative equivalence"; "linguistic equivalence / functional equivalence", etc.).

In spite of different denominations this opposition has proved to be very fruitful for contrastive linguistics and language education: the former made a lot of important statements concerning the dissimilar structure and the functional differences of the two languages, the latter built to a great extent on these statements in the selection of subject-matter for instruction and elaborating teaching methods. However, the translator does not translate languages but always concrete texts, so the normative translation theory -- which has always excluded the translator from its analyses -- could not render any help for translators searching for equivalences.

3.3. It is difficult to prove empirically the conception, according to which the translator begins his search for equivalence from formal correspondents and only takes a different way if formal correspondence fails to ensure textual equivalence.

> The translator begins his search for translation equivalence from formal correspondence, and it is only when the identical-meaning formal correspondent is either not available or not able to ensure equivalence that he resorts to formal correspondents with not-quite-identical meanings or to structural and semantic shifts which destroy formal correspondence altogether. (IVIR 1981: 58)

This statement which is called by G. TOURY (1986: 93) "a monitor model" of the process of translating, does not give an answer to

the question, whether it describes the idealized or the real process of translating. The examples I have analysed here, surely prove that this statement has some truth in it. Normally, it would not cause any problem if the translator started out from formal correspondence and he would start his search for equivalence-possibilities from langue-level formal correspondents. Here we should naturally make it clear beforehand where formal correspondence ends in a text and from what point we must talk about textual equivalence. This problem would take us very far and would suppose the clarification of numerous language-philosophical problems. Nevertheless, it can very well be seen that these two categories of descriptive nature are really difficult to apply in the approach of the mechanism of the real process of translating. So far, however, there is nothing wrong with it. The trouble starts when the translator -- for various psychological and psycholinguistic reasons -- stops at the point of searching for formal correspondents, he is satisfied with simple linguistic transcoding and does not try to step outside the uncertain field of formal correspondents. That is how he often gets caught in the trap. As we have seen, the danger of forcing the escape from this trap is also to be reckoned with: the translator puts aside the portion of text which causes him problems and simply sums up its content. This treatment may be, of course, totally acceptable in a number of cases, but in the case of translating literary texts we can greatly spoil the style.

4.1. At the end of this short presentation, as promised in the introduction, I would like to touch upon the pedagogical and methodical implications of the problem as well. Every fledgling trans-

lator has acquired the language from which he translates to some extent. However, he must never forget that during the process of translating, he does not translate "code"-sentences (i.e. langue-sentences in Saussureian terminology) but discours-sentences, and he does not have to accomplish equivalence at the level of the language ("langue"), but at the level of the text ("discours"). A contrastive linguistic description is able to create ("show") formal correspondences from a phoneme to a sentence at every linguistic level between two languages. However, these correspondences do not happen at the level of the text ("discours"), but at the level of the language ("langue"), they do not raise or describe translation problems but linguistic ones! These linguistic units within other language systems refer to the same reality: only their signifiés (their denotata) is common; their signifiants are not equivalent to one another. Let me quote the words of an Italian author here:

> If we consider translation the replacement of a communicative system by another one, this cannot be built into the "practical" act of translating and we cannot expect it to produce "equivalences". That is a linguistic form, which presumably has meaning, cannot be transmitted to another one, which similarly has meaning. The problem of translation, in our view, lies in this simple but fundamental precision. A linguistic unit does not have meaning, but it represents a meaningful situation. (ARCAINI 1984: 11)[3]

That is why the notion is wrong, according to which formal correspondences only exist between smaller linguistic units (phonemes, morphemes, words, syntagms), while translation equivalence can be accomplished at the level of sentences or linguistic units larger then sentences (i.e. at the level of texts). Neither half of this statement is true: any linguistic unit be it ever so small can be a "discours"-element in a text, and as such it has to be translated; at the same time we could transcode total texts -- although it is not usual in practice -- at the level of "langue" from one linguistic system to another.

4.2. The example sentences of the decontextualised contrastive linguistic analyses which are constructed in an artificial way, which are very often intentionally not realistic, usually illustrate some kind of linguistic (grammatical) phenomenon, that is why their version given in the other language (their "translation") cannot be regarded as translation equivalence, not even in the case of full sentences. The fledgling translator should not learn how to translate from linguistic descriptions, because it involves the risk of getting caught in the trap of formal correspondence, and since he knows the grammar and the words but not the language, he will not be able to get out of it. In order to perform any translation, a text is absolutely necessary. The sender (the author) of the text, wants to convey some kind of message or information to a supposed or actual receptive community. On the translator's side the intention to transmit this message towards the target language receivers, is essential. Characteristically, general linguistics,

treating translation as a part of applied linguistics, has carried on conceptual debates for a long time to decide whether the translator should achieve equivalence at the level of "langue" or "parole". Obviously, the answer does not include either of them but the level of "discours". We have to pay attention to the fact that we know very little about the nature of actual mental and psychic processes going on in "the" translator during the act of translating. Modern physics has taught us that there are certain basic uncertainties which can never be avoided: the Heisenberg principle concretised the internal uncertainty. Let me finish this presentation with a few words worthy of attention by Nobel prize-winning atomic physicist, Edward Teller, who is Hungarian by origin: "What we call understanding is often no more than the state, when we realize what we do not understand."

N O T E S

1
My translation. In the original: "La théorie de la traduction ou traductologie reste une praxéologie (Handlungswissenschaft) qui se mesure moins à des critères épistémologiques a priori de 'scientificité' qu'au résultat terminal et a posteriori de ces produits qu'on appelle des traductions, les textes-cible."

2
In an interesting way, the German translator, who is normally very thorough, has fallen into the same trap: "Heirate sie gleich, und ich sag dir nicht einmal mehr, wie spät es ist." (p. 72)

3
My translation. In the original: "La traduction -- vue comme processus de substitution d'un système de communication par un autre -- ne peut être assimilée à l'opération 'pratique' de fournir des 'équivalences'. En effet, une forme, dont on postule qu'elle a une signification, ne peut être transférée en une autre qui a elle aussi sa signification. Le problème de la traduction est, à nos yeux, dans cette précision simple mais fondamentale. Un fragment linguistique n'a pas une signification, mais représente une situation significative."

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